



Michigan High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area
613 Abbott Street, 2nd Floor
Detroit, MI 48226

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House of Representatives
Committee on Government Reform

Testimony
Abraham L. Azzam
Executive Director
Michigan HIDTA

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before your subcommittee. I am Abraham L. Azzam, Executive Director of the Michigan HIDTA. I have attached a professional biography of my law enforcement career and experience. I am proud that it chronicles 49 years of anti-drug law enforcement. (Attachment A)

The Michigan HIDTA has been in existence since July of 1997. We have an annual budget of only 3.25 million dollars. Within this budget we support 24 Initiatives (Task Forces), an Investigative Support Center (ISC), as well as the HIDTA administration. Our HIDTA is authorized to operate in nine counties, five in southeast Michigan and four in western Michigan. Our Investigative Support Center provides deconfliction services and analytical support to the whole State of Michigan. I have attached a brief description of the Michigan HIDTA and its daily operations. (Attachment B & C)

Michigan has a 700-mile border with our Canadian neighbors; it has Heroin, Cocaine, Marihuana, a growing problem with Methamphetamines, club drugs, and other legal and illegal prescription drugs. These drugs are prevalent in both the Upper and Lower Peninsulas of Michigan.

Michigan HIDTA has been committed to the most important HIDTA function, which is **coordinating and synchronizing** federal, state and law enforcement efforts. We have an engaged and animated Executive Board that works in harmony with each other, facing and solving the recurring problems associated with anti-drug, anti-terrorism and violent crimes. HIDTA has provided the neutral and effective environment for all of our law enforcement community to potentate their multi-agency and multi-jurisdictional strengths. It has proven to be a win-win arrangement. A most noticeable HIDTA effect has been the creation of an effective mechanism for our state and local law enforcement partners to interact and interface their information with the federal partners. This has proven to be valuable in their anti-terrorism efforts.

I am aware that you and your subcommittee are familiar with the HIDTA program. I was pleased that you visited the Michigan HIDTA several years ago while Indiana and Michigan shared an old-fashion midwinter snowstorm.

I am here to specifically testify and answer your questions as to the effect of the effort by John Walters and the ONDCP staff to terminate the HIDTA program in 2005/2006. In February of 2005, the assembled HIDTA directors were notified it was proposed the funding for the HIDTA program be significantly reduced, and the program be moved to the OCDETF program in the Department of Justice. You are also very aware of the unprecedented effort which saved the National HIDTA Program.

What you may not be aware of is the insidious effect the ill-conceived proposal had on the actual operational posture of the Michigan HIDTA. The first reaction was shock and disbelief, that we were betrayed by our own parent agency. The next result was the destabilization of the HIDTA infrastructure, internally and externally. From February to November of 2005, it was uncertain what the future would hold. We directors, with our state and local partners, were engaged with Congress to save HIDTA, Byrne and COPS grants. There was hope but no certainty until late in 2005. Meanwhile, internally there was turmoil. Our federal partners expressed support of HIDTA **privately**. Publicly, they were forced to be mute on the subject, which detracted from their credibility with our state and local partners.

In spite of constant reassurance, I could see and detect the effects that this destabilization had caused on the HIDTA staff. The loyal and dedicated people who make our HIDTA run include a Finance Manager, who once managed a Credit Union and is a single mother with two teenage children; an Information Technology (IT) Manager, a college graduate, married with triplets; an Administrative Assistant, also a college graduate and a single mother of a teenager; and my Deputy Director, a former Major in the U.S. Army who has been with me since Michigan HIDTA began. He is dedicated, smart and tough. He has been an excellent partner who loyally and effectively covered "My Six" for nine years. He and I have constantly reassured and calmed our staff, asking them to trust us and the Congress to rectify this terrible and onerous mistake by ONDCP. It would have been justified for them to leave the Michigan HIDTA for other, more stable employment. I am proud to say they stayed because they believe in the HIDTA philosophy, and most importantly, they trust **ME** and **YOU** to do the right thing.

The state and local members of the Executive Board, police chiefs, sheriffs, and prosecutors all contacted their respective federal legislators. Chief William J. Dwyer of Farmington Hills, Michigan, Chief Theodore Quisenberry of Royal Oak, Michigan and Undersheriff Michael McCabe of Oakland County, Michigan requested me to join them in briefing Congressman Joseph Knollenberg on the serious impact the loss of HIDTA, COPS and Byrne grants would have on the local law enforcement. Specifically, HIDTA provides the most efficient way to combine the resources of federal, state and local law enforcement assets. Statewide, other representatives were contacted, as well as our two senators. Mr. Knollenberg responded, as did almost all of the House and Senate, who recognized the folly of destroying decades of progress in law enforcement collaboration.

Specifically mentioned were the deconfliction coordination, anti-methamphetamine efforts, and the ability to interact with federal partners, drug violence, terrorism issues and other numerous benefits derived from HIDTA, Byrne and COPS grants. Our Executive Board and the law enforcement community generally were relieved and grateful to Congress for the restoration relief given us in 2005 and hopefully, again this year.

Now, in 2006, on the first Monday of February, the incredible has occurred. Mr. Walters and ONDCP again are proposing the destruction and disruption of the most effective law enforcement collaboration program in history.

On February 8, 2006, the Michigan HIDTA Executive Board met in Grand Rapids, Michigan in conjunction with the Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police (MACP) Winter Conference. They were all completely shocked, outraged and dismayed. We do not understand how completely out of touch with reality Mr. John Walters and the ONDCP staff have become. It seems as though the actions of the Congress in 2005 did not happen.

There has **not** been a credible National Strategy issued from ONDCP in several years. The HIDTA Program has been treated with utter disregard and disdain by Mr. Walters and his staff since the day he took office. All HIDTA directors provided input to the National Strategy, which was summarily

dismissed. In spite of our best efforts, he refuses to acknowledge the Performance Measurements Program, which documents the effectiveness of the HIDTA program. The National HIDTA program Return on Investment (ROI) is \$60 in wholesale drugs and \$3 for drug-related assets seized. The Michigan HIDTA has achieved a \$119 ROI on drugs and \$7 ROI for drug-related assets.

It has been quite obvious there is no love lost between ONDCP and the HIDTA directors. ONDCP actions regarding issues of the Performance Program, policy and procedures, fiduciary issues, the disregard of comprehensive threat assessments by all the HDTAs, the National Highway Interdiction Program, which has proven to be an excellent anti-terrorism program, and the continued effort to move HIDTA out of ONDCP, all seem to be aimed at circumventing the will of Congress and the National Law Enforcement Community, and for no good reason.

HIDTA's basic strength is derived from the fact it is not another federal agency. The neutrality emanating from the Office of National Drug Control Policy, Executive Office of the President, has been an asset, providing comfort to all participants. The U.S. Department of Justice is a strong and professional part of our operations. I fear it cannot provide the **Neutrality** necessary to engender voluntary participation of our local partners. DOJ by its function must be structured and focused on its mission.

The HIDTA Program by its nature must be regionally administered, equal and neutral. The sense of local ownership will be essentially lost if the program is moved to the Justice Department. If Mr. Walters is allowed to eliminate **any** HDTAs, U.S. law enforcement will regress.

The answer to these issues is obvious and simple to me. Let HIDTA remain in the Office of National Drug Control Policy. Properly fund and expand the HIDTA program to encompass the whole United States, not just 60% of the Nation. Most importantly, ONDCP must have a director and staff who are sensitive to the reality of the national drug problem with all its implications. Above all, a director who will lead, not isolate himself and his staff away from the reality of current events.

We need a leader who will recognize the unique strengths of the ONDCP and HIDTA. One who will offer the benefits of HIDTA to other essential efforts, such as the Department of Homeland Security **Fusion Centers**. HIDTA currently has the most integrated intelligence functions in our Investigative Support Centers (ISC) of any program I know.

This latest assault on the HIDTA program has compounded the uncertainty and lessened our credibility further. My fellow directors and I will continue to oppose the destruction of the HIDTA program. Meanwhile, I will return to Michigan, report developments to my Executive Board and law enforcement colleagues, many of whom asked me to invite you to conduct a **hearing in Michigan** where you can receive testimony from those who are on the front line of the law enforcement and anti-terrorism efforts -- state and local police officers, sheriffs and prosecutors.

I will continue to reassure my dedicated staff that their careers are secure. I will also continue to reassure my law enforcement colleagues that HIDTA has a future.

Thank you for accepting my testimony. I will answer any of your questions.

Abraham L. Azzam
Executive Director
Michigan HIDTA